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SOURCES OF DECORATION.

EVERYTHING that is really beautiful in artistic decoration must be appropriate. It is a principle of our mental constitution that no extreme of grace or refinement can impart unalloyed pleasure. Nature supplies the suggestive sources, but with us lies the application, and the characteristic of true art that it not only gratifies the mind but elevates the sentiments. It is for the artistic decorator to seize the characteristic traits of objects in the visible world, combine them, idealize them, and embody them in outward forms.

The restraint on the exercise of fancy, imposed by definite laws governing forms, colors and proportions, are really aids to successful accomplishment. The earlier works of many of the most eminent sculptors, and sculpture has an assured place in decoration,—often from the most admirable of their productions, owing to their having subsequently, in the strength of individual power, become audacious violators of the laws of art. Comparing the Medici monuments of Michael Angelo with his *Pieta*, we observe the far greater beauty that was born of his restraint than of his liberty.

It may surprise many to learn that anatomy, and the proportions and outlines of the human form constitute an important source of a wide class of design. The "lines of grace" are in segments of ovals—not of circles—and the entire body consists of these curves springing out of one another and in the most varied directions. If we examine in nature an object that appears round, it will be generally found to be composed of segmental oval lines. With these and straight lines the finest structural decorative compositions have been formed.

In nature the forms that possess the elements of beauty are never destitute of a specific end or object, however lowly their sphere. A deviation from the principle of designing an article for what it is not, as a representation of some preconceived notions, will account for many unsuccessful performances. So, too, does a defiance of rules in detail. Complex arrangements of lines and colors in decoration will injure their beauty. Nature cries out aloud against excess. Many of the most famous temples of India positively lose in effect by the excessive richness of ornamentation. Color is the less amenable to fixed laws, as the shades and modification of its tones being capable of being infinitely varied, a slight modification may alter results. Nature has ever been the great storehouse for the ornamental painter, with its symmetry, variation, repetition and contrasts of color. In form rectilinear and curvilinear lines, as shown in stems and leaves, both gain by juxtaposition. We adopt this principle with the Renaissance style in gas fixtures, some in wrought iron, others in polished brass, with their flowing lines and volutes, something suggesting foliage and tendrils from which spring the stems that bear the light.

Animal and bird forms have even contributed to decoration, as in the Egyptian couches, which were frequently in the shape of a lion, a jackall, or a bull standing on all fours, the upward curve of the head standing for the support of the pillow, while a mattress was laid upon the back; in the adornment of these singular pieces of furniture, gold and enamel were freely used. The legs of chairs were sometimes in the form of swans' necks, which were placed with their heads down.

In the Greek tripod support of vessels and dishes, the ends were connected by means of metal bars, and generally ornamented with flowers and foliage. Of this tripod there are frequent modern renderings. Such imitation, however, is not in the highest style of art, the latter, illustrated in the vases of the ancient Greeks and Romans, formed with the purest regard to geometry and the most elegant adaptations of nature, and still serving as types for our ceramic artists and gold and silversmiths and bronze workers. These vases are found valuable, first for their graceful outlines and perfect forms, and, secondly, for the minor decorations with which they are enriched. Their origin may be traced to the construction of certain flowers and foliage, the lines of which possess a sentiment seldom produced in modern designs.

The modeller has the same materials for his art, as the ancients, but to extract the treasures of nature requires delicacy of perception, a cultivated and refined judgment, and the faculty of comparison and nice discrimination to bear on objects of beauty.

The sentiments and associations which poetry and mythology have thrown around certain plants, allow them to be agreeably introduced for the ornamentation of objects with which they are

connected, for beautiful forms are capable of infinite variation. Thus the plants which rise from the banks of streams are suitable for water jugs, as in forming the handles with rising and descending flag leaves, and enriching the body or base with bulrushes and reeds in bas relief, or grouping round a lamp the flower identified with sleep.

The marine world has been heavily levied upon for new artistic devices and with the richest results. The beautiful shapes and lustrous lines and tints of shells, with their delicate shadings, so distinct in type from terrene objects, the marine plants, with their slender filaments and lace like combinations, sea monsters, the finny tribes and dwellers in ocean beds have all contributed their quota to decoration.

The colors of nature are too vast a subject on which to dwell. If our pencils cannot be dipped in ethereal tints, those tints are closely approached, particularly in metallic hues, and placed, so to speak, beyond the reach of change. The insect world itself is suggestive of forms and combinations of color. Mosaic work, marquetry, jewelry, variegated borders by brush or needle realise the transmuting power of art. All that is extracted from nature, combined and idealized, comes more closely than nature herself within human sympathy.

Metamorphosis has proved a prolific source of ornamental design, both in wood and bronze furniture. Caryatides, Atlantes, the Winged Sphinx, Griffins, the Sacred Birds—in fact all the symbolic representations of that strange mutation of faith which coming rudely from the earliest Orientals, was rendered beautiful in the refining hands of the Greeks. Such objects are to be found on bas-relief marbles, pedestals and on bronze ornaments, of which the largest collection in the world is from the exhumed city of Pompeii. The general character of such ornamentation is extreme simplicity and lightness—the reverse of middle-age florid decorations: the aim is the beautiful not the grotesque.

In the combination of birds, flowers, leaves and reptiles we may refer to a design for a candlestick, in which the principal feature is a bird, one in full song, the other sleeping with its head nestled beneath its wing. The socket of the candlestick is formed of the leaves and flowers of the minor convolvulus; a mass of acanthus leaves, from which springs a branch of the major convolvulus, and which is made a resting place for the birds. A band of primroses encircles the stem, just above the pedestal, which consists of a serpent entwined among elongated leaves.

Flowers to the designer are full of suggestiveness, especially those that grow in their natural wildness, with no meretricious ornament disturbing the simplicity and the repose of associations which they incite. With their entwining stems, flowers in woods and gardens invite their introduction of graceful forms in works of art. There is nothing wooden about them. The jessamine and honeysuckle throw out their tender stems where they will; the full blown rose, from which the bee is imbibing his nectared food, and the opening tulip are marvels of delicate workmanship. The artistic garlanding of shafts is suggested by the wild vines and other parasites that clamber round forest trees; and the most beautiful of garland drapery forms are to be found in nature.

In a beautiful artistic work, however, the original source or sources may be hidden or require the most subtle skill to trace, for it is the glory of the mind, acting like a powerful alembic, to transfer in a manner all it touches in bodying forth conceptions more or less ideal. Direct imitation, however, though it has been denounced, is quite within the province of art; it pleases and that is sufficient. In imitating in another material it is wholly varied. Much might be written on the hints to decoration derived from constructive forms carried out by creatures in the lower creation. The spider's web, for instance, outlined in gold or silver, forms a beautiful tracery for a paper ceiling design, parti-colored leaves being represented as caught up and entwined in the threads.

FURNITURE POLISH.—Equal parts sweet oil and vinegar and a pint of gum arabic, well powdered; shake the bottle and apply with a rag. It will make the furniture look as good as new.

